

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and
Chapters

University of Nebraska Press

2002

Safe by a Mile

Charlie Metro

Tom Altherr

Metropolitan State College of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Metro, Charlie and Altherr, Tom, "Safe by a Mile" (2002). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters*. 4.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.



Safe by a Mile

Charlie Metro with
Tom Altherr

University of
Nebraska Press
Lincoln and
London

© 2002 by the University of Nebraska Press
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America

All photographs are from the Metro family collection.



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Metro, Charlie, 1918–

Safe by a mile / Charlie Metro with Tom Altherr.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-8032-8281-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Metro, Charlie, 1918– . 2. Baseball managers—United States—Biography.

I. Altherr, Tom. II. Title.

GV865.M49 A3 2002

796.357'092—dc21

[B]

2001053180



To my wife, Helen Deane Bullock Metro, and my children: my daughter, Elena, and my sons, Bud (Charles Jr.), Steve, and Geoff

Contents

	List of Illustrations, ix
	Acknowledgments, xi
	Introduction, xiii
1	Hookey from High School, 1
2	The Big Leagues Were a Long Way Off, 24
3	Up with Detroit and Philadelphia, 63
4	Go West, Young Man, 106
5	Points South, 157
6	The Road Back to Triple-A, 192
7	Mile High, Here We Come, 227
8	A Car Missing a Wheel, 250
9	Scouting, the Toughest Job in Baseball, 281
10	Putting All the King's Men Together, 316
11	If This Is Tuesday, It Must Be Albuquerque, 345
12	Billy Ball, 378
13	Retirement? What Retirement?, 403
14	My Own Hall of Fame, 441
15	I Dream of Baseball, 469
	Appendix: Career Statistics, 499
	Index, 503

Illustrations

following page 142

1. Charlie at age two with his father
2. Charlie with third grade friends
3. Charlie as a high school senior, with friends
4. Charlie after his release from Easton, 1937
5. Charlie with the Pennington Gap team, 1938
6. Charlie back home in Nanty-Glo, Pennsylvania, with the mayor and a friend, 1938
7. Charlie and Helen Deane Bullock courting, 1939
8. Charlie with the Mayfield Browns of Kentucky, 1939
 9. Helen and Charlie visiting Charlie's mother, Pauline Moreskonich, January 1942
10. Charlie and John Gorsica in Philadelphia, 1943 or 1944
 11. Al Simmons, Charlie, and Mr. Mack, 1944
12. Charlie at the batting tee in Twin Falls, Idaho, 1948
 13. Charlie at Yankees spring training, Boyes Hot Springs, California, 1948
14. Charlie with Ty Cobb in Twin Falls, Idaho, 1948
15. Charlie after a fight in Twin Falls, Idaho, 1948

following page 300

16. Charlie with his umpire brother, John, at spring training, Montgomery, Alabama, 1952
17. The Metro family, December 1956
18. Charlie as one of three luncheon speakers, Riverside, California, 1957
19. Charlie with sons Steve and Bud, Vancouver dugout, 1957
20. Charlie managing with the Denver Bears, 1960
21. Rival managers Casey Stengel and Charlie, 1962
22. Charlie with his youngest son, Geoff, 1965

23. Charlie in the Tulsa Oilers dugout, 1966
24. Ted Williams and Charlie, 1970
25. Charlie coaching with the Oakland A's, 1982
26. Charlie and Billy Williams with Hitters' Hands sculpture, 1993
27. Helen and Charlie at their ranch, Arvada, Colorado, 1999

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the editorial staff of the University of Nebraska Press for their invaluable help, which has undoubtedly made this a better book; Joan Foster, the dean of the School of Letters, Arts, and Sciences at Metropolitan State College of Denver, who contributed some funding for the transcription; Steve Gietschier, director of historical records at *The Sporting News*; Jim Gates, Tim Wiles, and the staff of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library in Cooperstown; Paul White of *Baseball Weekly*; the members of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), particularly the Rocky Mountain chapter, of which we have been members; baseball historians, such as Larry Gerlach and Mark Rucker, who have been great encouragers of this project; and Sharon Porter, Chris Hause, and Lisa Haight, who provided invaluable transcription help.

From Charlie Metro: I would particularly like to thank the people of Nanty-Glo and Jenners, Pennsylvania; my major league managers, Mr. Connie Mack and Steve O'Neill, and other baseball people: Casey Stengel, Cedric Tallis, Billy Martin, Jack Fournier, Al Lopez, Al Campanis, Tommy Lasorda, and Bob Howsam, who was there all the time when I needed him, and all the players I played with, managers and coaches I played for, all the players who played for me, all the organizations I worked for, all the sportswriters who wrote about me, all the sportscasters who covered me, all the fans in all the cities where I played, coached, managed, and scouted, and my many friends, especially the late Eddie Newman, and Raelee Frazier and Frank Frazier for their association with Hitters' Hands. And, of course, I would like to thank my wife, Helen, and my children, who followed me around the country all those years, and my brothers and sisters, who were among my biggest boosters, and especially my father, Metro, who encouraged me in baseball, and my mother, Pauline, who got me out of the coal mines.

From Tom Alberr: I would especially like to thank my brothers, Douglas, Paul, and James, and their families; my colleagues in the history department at Metropolitan State College of Denver and at other institutions, particularly Richard Aquila at Ball State University, for their patience and support; and last, but hardly least, Jenny, who has been there all along.

Introduction

My father might as well have put a baseball in my hand when I was born, even before the doctor slapped me into this world. As far back as I can remember, baseball has been a part of my life. I wouldn't trade my career for anything. I have seen about everything imaginable in baseball, but just when I think so, I see something totally new, almost every ball game. The game is always interesting to me; I can't understand people who claim it's boring. For me it's the perfect game, a gift from God that elevated our country's spirit throughout the rough times of this past century. I've said many a time that after I go to that great natural grass diamond in the sky, I want a handful of my ashes spread over a ballpark during the seventh-inning stretch.

Every time I walk into a ballpark, go up a ramp or down the steps, and see that expanse of green, I still get the same goose bumps I did when I was a kid and saw my first major league game at old Forbes Field in Pittsburgh. How could I forget my first glimpse of Yankee Stadium? This was the place where *they*, the ballplayers who were only names on the radio and in the newspapers, were *playing!* In the flesh! Even today, when I go to a game at Coors Field, a true gem of a ballpark if there ever was one, I can hardly wait to enter the stadium, hobnob with the ushers and any Rockies personnel I see, chat with friends from the opposition, and settle into my seat for the game. I don't always stay for every inning anymore, but that hasn't dampened any of my enthusiasm for this greatest of all games.

Someone once asked me what I would do if there were no baseball. He didn't mean like the strikes during 1981 and 1994, which were bad enough. He meant what if baseball disappeared entirely. I told him that I couldn't even imagine a total loss of baseball. What a vacuum! How could you possibly wake up on a summer morning and thumb through a newspaper without box scores? What would a spring evening be without the hum of

a radio broadcast of a ball game? What would a September conversation consist of without the tension of the stretch run or the wait-until-next-year resignation of, say, Cubs fans? Baseball fills up our lives as well as our hearts.

Baseball, for me, is akin to a religion. I say that with no trace of sacrilegious intent. It's certainly more important than a pastime. Look at the emotions that the game evokes, the memories that it triggers. Tribes of fans identify strongly with their teams, rooting them on and warding off insults from competitors. Fans wear their colors, regalia, and paraphernalia with intense pride. They recite statistics and conjure up memories, even here in Colorado with the young Rockies franchise. The national anthem before the game and the singing of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" serve as the hymns—I know all the words to the latter, even the second stanza! Passions fly in the discussions. Debates over the three greatest outfielders of all time or the best left-handed relievers flare up all the time and bring out the true believers. Let a franchise fall apart and the faithful wring their hands over the demise with all the warnings of an Old Testament prophet: What happened to the Tigers? Where did the Mets go? Who can resurrect the Pirates? Players perform rituals on and off the field over and over again with the devotion of longtime parishioners. They adhere to superstitions more fiercely than perhaps even a spiritualist. Older players teach the traditions to the rookies to complete the generational cycle of the religion. The game has changed some of its rules since the 1860s and undergone other transformations, but the religious qualities have only deepened.

Without baseball some of us would be slaves. Personally I would have most likely been trapped working in the coal mines in western Pennsylvania. That was tough dangerous work. Sometime just read a history of coal mining or track down the May 1943 issue of *Life* magazine that documented the struggle in my hometown of Nanty-Glo. I would have been toting a lunchpail like most of my friends and worrying when the next explosion would snuff out some more of us. Baseball gave me hope of a better life and lighted the way up out of those tunnels. I worked hard, dug out a lot of coal, and suffered injuries from a mine blast. I was lucky enough to come out alive.

But there was baseball as a savior, a glorious outdoor game, not just a ticket out of poverty but a chance to run free in the sunshine. At a time when fewer and fewer Americans were working or playing outdoors, I got the chance to play and work at a profession that celebrated the grassy expanses and to escape from the stale air of the mines and factories and offices. Can you begin to guess how refreshing it was to dash about the outfield in pursuit of fly balls? Do you remember that first time you circled

under a high fly, the sky a perfectly heartbreaking blue, hardly a cloud around, the air so balmy and the wind so warm, the ball seemed to stay up there forever? I knew, in my bones, what the “Shoeless Joe” Jackson character in *Field of Dreams* meant when he talked about the “thrill of the grass.” How could it be anything less than thrilling? Whenever I see people, even ballplayers, sweating away in workout gyms in daylight, in spring, in summer, in the fall, peddling machines and pushing weights, I scratch my head. There isn’t a single play in baseball where you ride a stationary bicycle around the bases! I want to say to them, that’s all well and good but get out into the sunshine, sweat it out in the grass and dust, run from foul line to foul line, take a hundred ground balls at infield practice, shag a hundred flies in the outfield, play pepper and limber up every muscle in your body, feel the pleasure of good, honest sweat trickle down your face. Exercise should be liberating, not confined torture. And it should come outdoors, even in the cold and even in some rain.

I have had a unique career in baseball. I played for Steve O’Neill with the Detroit Tigers in 1943 and 1944, and for Connie Mack, ’er pardon me, *Mr. Mack*, with the Philadelphia A’s in 1944 and 1945, and I coached for Billy Martin with the Oakland A’s in 1982. I was a member of the Chicago Cubs “college of coaches,” and when my turn to manage came in June 1962, I ended up convincing Mr. Wrigley to not send me down but instead let me stay at the helm the rest of the season. In 1968 I became Director of Player Procurement for the newly forming Kansas City Royals franchise and helped them become the most successful expansion team in that era. In 1970 I also took a turn at managing that club, making me one of several managers to manage in both leagues. I missed the chance to manage the “Big Red Machine” by a week, instead recommending George “Sparky” Anderson for the job. I crossed town in Chicago in 1963 and coached and scouted for Al Lopez’s White Sox. I was a scout for Tommy Lasorda’s Los Angeles Dodgers. That got me three World Series rings, the last one for winning over the “cursed Yankees” in 1981. I helped secure the signing of Fernando Valenzuela from Mexico. I was the first “eye in the sky” or “spy in the sky,” the guy up in the press box or out in the bleachers with a walkie-talkie directing the outfielders where to play certain batters. I scouted for Cincinnati and Detroit, and I was the cross-checker for the National Scouting Bureau.

But it took me a while to make it to the majors. I played hookey from high school in 1937 and attended a St. Louis Browns tryout camp in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, with about 1,500 competitors and was one of fourteen players signed to a minor league contract, one of three to get very far. I had a less-

than-promising first year at Easton, Maryland, in the Eastern Shore League in 1937, but in 1938, I recovered and did better at Pennington Gap, Virginia. By 1939 I was at Mayfield, Kentucky, in the Kitty League, where I had the great fortune to meet Helen Deane Bullock, the lady who became my wife of sixty years and mother of our four children. The next stops were at Palestine and Texarkana in the East Texas League in 1940 and then back to Texarkana when it went into the Cotton States League the next year. In 1942 I met up with one of the men I most admired and whom I named one of our sons after, Steve O'Neill, who was the manager at Beaumont in the Texas League.

I had a real good year at Beaumont, so when Steve went up to manage the Detroit Tigers in 1943, he took me with him. I finally made the majors! I didn't play much, because I couldn't get the hang of hitting major league breaking balls. But I did some pinch running and played good defense. In 1944 I made the club again, but by midseason, possibly because I had been active in some players' union business, the Tigers released me. The Philadelphia Athletics picked me up. There I learned a lot more about baseball under the tutelage of Mr. Mack, but the A's were a second-division club, not a contender like Detroit.

After my stay with the Philadelphia A's, I ended up out at Oakland in the Pacific Coast League. The next year I met up with Charles Dillon "Casey" Stengel, a manager who, like Mr. Mack, taught me an immense amount about the game. Never did I dream that one day I would manage against the "Ole Perfesser" and his Mets and even beat them out for ninth place (well, just barely) in 1962. I also made the acquaintance of a scrappy clubhouse boy named Billy Martin, who would pester me into throwing him batting practice in between his duties. The Oaks, however, sent me to the Seattle Rainiers for the last half of 1946.

Seattle released me during spring training the next year, much to my shock and disappointment. I thought I had the club made. It was one of the darkest hours of my life. I was down to \$3.75 and had a family to support. As luck would have it, at that moment the Yankee scout Joe Devine got me a spot as playing manager for the Yankees' Class C Bisbee, Arizona, club. I had done Joe a great favor a few years before by giving him scouting information on Texas League players. This new assignment launched me on a minor league managerial career that took me to Twin Falls, Idaho; Montgomery, Alabama; Augusta, Georgia; Durham, North Carolina; Charleston, West Virginia; Terre Haute, Indiana; Idaho Falls, Idaho; Vancouver, British Columbia; and Denver, Colorado (where Helen

and I decided to settle down on a small ranch west of the city) with clubs in the Yankees, Tigers, Cardinals, and Orioles organizations.

Much of the time, my teams finished second or third, but in 1960, my Denver Bears went all the way to the championship. Only twice did I have a last-place club, the first at Montgomery in 1953 and then at Charleston in 1956, mainly because the Detroit system stocked it with over-the-hill players. In 1966, after three years with the White Sox, I accepted Bob Howsam's offer to skipper the Tulsa Oilers, a Cardinals farm team in the American Association. We had a fine squad, anchored by future Hall of Famer Steve Carlton, and we won the flag. The next year I went back up to the majors as a scout for the Cincinnati Reds, where I got my first look at Johnny Bench and penned a note to Bob Howsam, then at Cincinnati himself, that that Oklahoma catcher was a "can't miss" superstar. The remainder of my career was with the majors, but I always looked back on my minor league record with a definite sense of pride.

My career had some additional unique aspects. Unless I miss my guess, I'm probably the only Ukrainian-American to have played *and* managed in the big leagues. Out of perhaps 50 million Ukrainians worldwide and who knows how many in America, I was maybe the luckiest. What are the odds on that? In my first three years, I earned more money than Babe Ruth did in his first three! You could look it up, but I'll save you the trouble. The Babe pulled down the paltry sums of \$1,900 for 1914 and \$3,500 for 1915 and 1916 respectively. The Tigers tossed \$3,600 my way for each of 1943 and 1944, and the Athletics raised me to \$5,500 for 1945. Imagine outearning the best player ever in baseball! As a manager in the minor leagues, I believe I may have directed the clubs to more wins than virtually any other skipper; if not the one with the most, I'm high on the list.

As a baseball man, I spent a lot of time trying to improve equipment and training methods. In the mid-1930s, I invented the batting tee. Like a lot of kids, we were constantly swinging at stones and bottle caps and, when we could get them, actual balls. I scrounged up a piece of real hard rubber pipe, split one end on it in four pieces, and nailed the bent supports to a board. Just place a ball on top and work on that swing! Ten years later I tried to get a patent but couldn't at that time justify the five hundred dollars or so necessary to complete the legal process. I was the first manager to experiment with batting cages down the left-field line, at the stadium in Kansas City, and have my pinch hitters warm up in them. That caused a dispute with umpire Charlie Berry in 1970.

Since I retired in 1984, I have kept my hand in the game, doing a little

bit of bird-dogging and going to meetings and reunions here and there and experimenting with new bats and planning my comeback. In the past few years, I have launched a new project called Hitters' Hands. A Denver sculptor, Raelee Frazier, convinced me to let her make a bronze model of my hands wrapped around a baseball bat. The sculpture came out so incredibly lifelike that I had the brainstorm of persuading Hall of Famers to get their hands molded for posterity, in their favorite batting grip around their favorite bat and with wristbands from the team they played for the most. The bat would be fastened to a home plate base of either walnut or oak with their signature lasered on. We've done some pitcher's hands too. We have placed a Ted Williams sculpture in the Smithsonian Institution, three others in the Arizona Diamondbacks museum, as well as some in other museums, and we hope to sell others to baseball memorabilia collectors and interested museums.

I have seen baseball from every angle imaginable. As my friends say, I'm like horse manure—always around and underfoot. I have played, coached, managed, or scouted in just about every commercial ballpark and stadium in the United States and quite a few in Canada, the Caribbean, and Mexico. I counted up forty-four major league stadiums alone, and I drove by two more, the old Baker Bowl in Philadelphia and Braves Field in Boston. How many times did I stand at third base, coaching, sweating a one-run lead, looking up at my wife while she was having a hot dog and a Coke or the fans were having beers. A Denver exhibition of panoramic photographs of past and present parks a few years ago brought back a flood of memories. With most of the photographs, I could point to the exact spot where I hit a home run or where I first saw a current ballplayer take tentative rookie swings or where I got thrown out of a game for questioning an umpire's ancestry. My "gold card" for forty-plus years of service in baseball nearly always gets me two seats at any ballpark, and on a couple of occasions when it hasn't, I managed to get in anyway by hook or by crook.

Because I didn't have a long and famous playing career, because I wasn't a Joe DiMaggio or a Mickey Mantle, I have been able to observe baseball minus the filter of fame and the excessive distractions of the media. Without hundreds of writers following me around when I was a player or in my early days of managing, I could pay attention to what made those great players superb, what it took to bump a player's skills up a notch or two, what were the overall strategies and finer points of winning a ball game. I was able to communicate the virtues of hard work and the regimen of practice to younger players, to cultivate their burning desire to play, because I saw myself in them. To be sure, I would have loved to have gone on to be a

Hall of Famer, yet I wouldn't trade what I did have for the long career of learning and teaching, for what I was able to impart to hundreds of players.

Nearly fifty years meant a carload of changes. I personally witnessed the days of baseball's racial integration. I saw the fires of Detroit's race riots in 1943. I observed the first wave of African-American minor leaguers to play in the South in the early 1950s, watching their anguish in the face of bigotry and their determination to excel. I handled a baseball tryout for a black athlete for the presidents of Tuskegee Institute and Alabama State University and received thanks personally from Martin Luther King Jr. In 1960, when the Sheraton Seelbach Hotel in Louisville refused to give rooms to three black ballplayers on my Denver Bears—Jake Wood, Bubba Morton, and Ozzie Virgil—I did my small part to force that hotel to integrate. In 1962, when I managed the Cubs, Buck O'Neil, the former star first baseman of the Kansas City Monarchs, became the first African-American to coach in the major leagues. When I became a scout, I was the first to stop marking racial designations on scouting reports. Bill White, the Cardinals star and later president of the National League, was among the first to remark on that switch to racial equality. I helped recruit Latin American players for the Dodgers. And now baseball with its racial diversity is all the better for the steps that Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey took fifty years ago. For me, a son of immigrant parents, baseball—the sport and the ball itself—has been the great equalizer.

Additionally, I have watched the massive changes in the commercialization of the sport with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the amounts of money involved have spiraled upward so fast, it's almost dizzying. On the other hand, I don't begrudge the players their salaries. Today's players make more great plays in one week than I would have seen in a season in the 1940s. I wish, however, that Major League Baseball would revise the pension rules to include us players who played before 1947. If the major leagues were to restore their image and market the game effectively to its greatest potential worldwide, there would be more than enough money to go around. I don't have the greatest sympathy for small-market franchises who let their scouting systems and minor leagues deteriorate and then come whining for revenue sharing. The best franchises have achieved their greatness by working hard and paying attention to details throughout the system. Sloppiness earns its own miserable rewards. And yet, through all of the bickering, the labor disputes, the strikes, the arrogant players, and the other elements that have detracted from the game, I still see the game I have loved all along, this grand game of baseball, shining through, with the same vibrancy as when I first saw it so many years ago.

Hookey from High School

Baseball has been my life as far back as I can remember. I don't ever remember when I didn't know anything about baseball, when I wasn't crazy about it. I never thought that I would do anything else but baseball from the day that I was old enough, when I was just a little guy in fourth and fifth grade, when I was a mascot for the town team. I was obsessed with it. And it stayed with me all of my life, for my forty-eight years in the game. I never wanted any other job, never thought for one minute that I would be anything but a ballplayer.

I was born on April 28, 1918, to Metro and Pauline Moreskonich. I was raised in the coal mining country of western Pennsylvania, Heilwood in Indiana County, Jenners in Somerset County, and Nanty-Glo in Cambria County. Baseball—good gosh!— was all over the place. When I got up there in about the third, fourth, fifth grade, Babe Ruth was a household name. People were always talking about the Yankees or the closer Pittsburgh Pirates. Over in Johnstown was a club in the Mid-Atlantic League. Kids played whenever they could, pickup games and the like. Every coal mining town and every steel mill town had a team, and they had leagues, the Somerset County Coal League and so forth. There were some good players. One guy, Rip Engle, who played catcher for Acosta, eventually became a very fine football coach at Penn State University.

My father was crazy about baseball. I don't know where or how he got the love of the game. He came from the Ukraine, so he never saw the sport until he came to the United States. He just had a love of baseball. He liked everything about it, the action of it. He made bats by hand for the town team. Later on I worked one summer and bought him a wood lathe with my earnings, and he made baseball bats. He called them the "Metro Special." He used to walk to see ball games eight or ten miles, every Saturday or Sunday, when the mines didn't work very much, and if there was a game

scheduled in the middle of the week, he would walk to those games. I'd go with him when I was just a little guy. He loved it, and he knew all the players by name. I think he played in a baseball game only once. He got hit in the nose by a batted ball, and he left the game frustrated. He used to catch me when I was a young guy in the lower grades. He'd warm me up. One time I threw a ball pretty hard, and even though he had the catcher's mitt, he got hit, just smack, right in the nose. He threw down the mitt and said, "No more. You're throwing too fast for me."

He had great faith in baseball. He once told me, when I was in the second or third grade, "Charlie, you can do anything you want if you play baseball, *anything*." That was his simple way of saying that I could do anything. Baseball would be a means of acquiring a better life. That stuck in my mind and drove me on. And I have passed this on to ballplayers: you can do anything you want to do.

Years later I would read the baseball box scores for my father. He came over from the Ukraine, and he couldn't read or write English. But he loved baseball. When I started playing in the county league, box scores would be printed in the paper. It really pleased him that the writers would drop our name of Moreskonich because it wouldn't fit very well in the box score and replace it with Metro. That was my father's first name. So they called me "Little Metro," and later I became Charlie Metro. I would read the box scores to him, read the names of the players. He would memorize and recognize them. Then when I started playing professionally, I would always take out a subscription to the local paper and send it to him. At first he'd have somebody help him go down the columns of names, but after looking enough at the writing, he learned to read that way.

I had a great boyhood. I played in the woods in the summertime and played baseball and swam in the creek, did about everything there was to do. I never had a bike. We didn't have school buses. We had to run everywhere, walk everywhere we went. I used to trap for muskrats and weasels. You could get twenty cents for a muskrat pelt and a whole dollar for a weasel skin, if it had no holes in it. I'd find a hollow log with a small hole on one end and a big hole on the other, where I'd set the trap and nail the chain. Then I'd bait it with bacon rind. One day I went to check my trapline, and I saw that the chain had been dragged into the hole. For some reason, I thought twice before I bent over to check it. Lucky for me I hesitated, because that skunk let loose a blast, and it didn't hit me. I waited two weeks until the skunk died to get my trap back.

It seemed like there was always a baseball game going on. When you were kids, you picked up a pickup squad, you threw the bat and did the

picking up of your team, you played on a sandlot or a vacant lot, always in the country, out in the small schools, little mining towns, little country towns, farming towns, out in the open air. We used to hit bottlecaps with broomsticks. That was a popular thing when I was a young boy. We'd get a handful of bottlecaps, pick them up and save them. Then some guy would get a broomstick, and one guy would pitch the bottlecaps and the other guy would hit. They sure could throw some pretty wicked curve balls with those bottle caps, and it was very good practice. They had caps from the root beer. We'd call it "Ruth Beer." If you got enough of those caps, you could get a Babe Ruth model glove. We used to watch for people at the grocery store to buy a case of that root beer, and we'd stop at their houses to ask for the caps. It wasn't easy to collect the caps. You might get only one Babe Ruth cap from a whole case. It broke my heart because I couldn't get enough caps for a glove, but it was one of the big things among us kids. We didn't have baseball cards, like bubble gum cards later, but we had tobacco cards. In winter, we'd play fox and geese and throw snowballs, have snowball fights, and build forts and snow caves. Even then I was building up my arm by throwing snowballs for accuracy.

We had to scrounge for equipment. We got sticks out of the woods to use as bats, until my father made my first bat. My first ball was one we found in the creek, floating down the creek right by the ballpark. We had come up that creek and somebody said, there's a baseball. In we jumped and got the ball. The team had foul-tipped the ball, and it went into the creek. Before they could get there, we found it. That was my first baseball. Boy, that was a good one. We dried it off and played with it, I think for a whole year. We taped it up over and over again with black tape. And my first glove I made from the tops of those old touring cars. I don't know what the material was, but it was black. I sewed the outside edges of it, but I didn't put the fingers in it, because it was too hard to make them. So I made it a catcher's mitt, and stuffed it with cotton out of an old mattress. That was my first glove. Later on when I needed spikes, my father fashioned a pair. Spikes were expensive. My father was a pretty good shoemaker. He would take a pair of my old shoes, not the high tops but the over-the-ankle ones, and he would put a new sole on the shoe and then rivet the spikes on the sole. Sometimes he'd find an old pair of cleats that somebody discarded, or we'd buy new cleats and he'd rivet them on. We always found ways to play baseball.

When I was a young guy, six years old, I was catching and throwing a baseball, watching baseball games. And when I'd gotten to about sixth grade in Jenners, I was the batboy for the town team. I traveled with the

club and took care of the bats and the catcher's equipment. I'd carry the equipment in a sack, lugging and dragging it with me. Around that time we traveled by truck. We'd get the team loaded up on a truck, and I'd get all the equipment and throw it on there. One time we went over to a town named Hooverville. I got into a game with the bigger guys. Only eight of our players showed up. I'd been running around catching fly balls and ground balls and throwing the ball, like all the kids do, especially the little batboy, in a uniform that they'd provided me and a little old pair of spike shoes. Short one player, the older guys finally said, "Well, let's put little Metro out there in right field." I had caught a few balls in my time out there practicing. So I went out in right field and, as my luck would have it, here came a fly ball my way about the second or third inning. I ran in there and caught that fly ball and threw it into second base. Boy, I got a pretty good standing ovation from all the spectators at the ballpark. About the fifth inning, here came another fly ball, and I caught that fly ball too, a difficult catch for me at that time. I'll tell you, I was the hero. I didn't do much hitting. I couldn't hit over the infielders' heads when they threw to me off the mound, but I got a base hit off of soft-toss pitching. But making those catches was a highlight. My father was there, and I guess you've never seen a prouder man, and, of course, I was pretty cocky and pleased with myself. I don't even know who won the game, but afterward, the fans took up a collection and bought me a quart of ice cream right across the street at a grocery store. That was my first big pay as a player! Boy, I said, if this is what you get for playing baseball, I'm going to play forever.

My mom, however, made me do chores. We had a big family and we had a cow. I had to milk that darn thing. I didn't know how to milk a cow. We had to build a little barn for it out on the back of our property. Then I had to get all the firewood for the winter. I had to learn how to saw down those trees, the maple trees and the oak trees. My mother had a garden that had to be spaded early every spring, and that was my job. I couldn't go and play baseball until it was done. My mother loved her garden. She grew Oxheart tomatoes that she was so proud of. They were great big tomatoes, just like two double fists in size. They were wonderful eating tomatoes. I don't know that I've seen them since. Every once in a while, one of the neighbors would come over and want to buy one of those tomatoes. But she knew that they wanted them for the seeds, so she wouldn't sell them or give them away. She would win the prize at the little old fair every year with her Oxheart tomatoes. My mother canned everything. Gosh, we would have a thousand quarts of things. She'd can everything. She never threw anything away. As kids, in August we'd go up to the mountains and pick

blackberries. We had blackberries galore. She canned, I guess, hundreds of quarts of blackberries. My father, whose integrity slipped when it came to this, would go into where she had all of her canned things and he'd pull the rubber out of the quart jars. And the blackberries would go sour, and he would come in and look at them and tell my mother that she didn't tighten up those jars well enough. There'd be maybe fifteen or twenty quarts of those berries soured up. There was nothing to do but throw them away, but he'd say, "Well, we won't throw them away. We'll make wine out of them." My mother finally caught on.

My father was a coal miner, and he loved his beer and he loved his wine. He'd take a drink, and sometimes he'd drink too much. Finally my mother would make my father go to the priest and take an oath that he wouldn't drink for three months or six months. My father never broke it . . . while he was at home. Later on, when he would come visit us and watch games in North Carolina or Vancouver, he would take a nip. He always claimed that the oath applied only in the state of Pennsylvania.

So I spaded that garden, and I swear, at that time I thought that doggone thing was about two acres. God, I hated to dig that garden up in the spring instead of playing. Everybody was playing baseball, and I had to dig that garden up. Later on in life, I took my two grown sons back there to Jenners and showed them the home that we lived in. They wanted to know where that big garden was, and there it was, about twenty-five feet wide and about fifty feet long. They said they thought I said that it was two acres. I got out of that pretty easy. I said that I thought it was two acres. It felt like five acres. I thought it was five acres.

We'd have to go to church every Sunday. My father would get me dressed up. Of course all I could think of was baseball. The church was up on top of the hill, and the baseball park was right down below it. I wanted to go down there and watch. There was going to be a game, and I wanted to watch the guys hit, practice, and everything else. We had a priest that was a heck of a guy and a baseball fan, but doggone, his sermons were long. They would go on for three, three and a half hours. We'd start about 9:30 or 10:00 Sunday mornings, and the game would be starting about 12:00. I was the altar boy, gown and everything, so I couldn't get off to get down there early.

But when I was a kid, my nose would bleed at the least little thing. I'd bump my nose and it would bleed. I don't know why, nothing chronic or anything, but it would bleed. So I figured out a way to get to play and watch baseball. When the priest was dragging on and the game was about to get started, I'd reach up and slap myself on the nose. Sure enough, it would

start to bleed. And I'd just start a-sniffing. Sniff, sniff, sniffing. Eventually the priest would take a look at me, and he would shake his head, no, no, no, no, and I'd keep sniffing, and all of a sudden, he'd give me the nod to go. I'd rush into the back room, take off that robe, and down that hill I'd go. When the sermon was over and church let out, here would come my father and the priest down to the ballpark. The priest would walk up to me and say, "Little Charlie, how is the nose?" I would say, "Oh, pretty good, but"—then I'd sniff—"still bleeding." And he'd laugh.

Babe Ruth and the Yankees were household words, spoken with reverence. When I was about age twelve, I made up my mind to go to New York to see the Bambino and the Pinstripers. I was peddling grocery flyers, those sale flyers that the grocers put out for the weekend. I conned four grocery stores into letting me distribute their bills for their weekend sales. Each paid me a quarter, so I got a buck all together. I decided to hitchhike to New York. I had a dollar and a dime. I had an older sister living in New York, so I knew I would have a place to stay.

On the way I spent a night in the jail in Gettysburg. I was hitchhiking along U.S. Route 30. It was a cold and rainy evening. When I got to Gettysburg, I saw a house with a porch and a swing, so I sat on it to get out of the rain. The people who lived there were gone, but as they were coming home, they called the cops. The policeman asked me what I was doing. I told him I was going to New York to see Babe Ruth. The officer took me down to the jail and assigned me a bunk in a cell. The door was open, of course. They told me I had to be up and out of there by 6:00 A.M.. I had a good night's sleep. One of the cops did a little cooking in the jail, and he fed me a little breakfast. I sat there and ate breakfast with him. He told me, "Now you be careful. You don't get in trouble." I said, "No, sir, no, sir. But I'm going to see Babe Ruth." I've had great respect for police ever since that day. Rested and a little less hungry, I was off to see the Babe.

When I finally got to New York, I used half of my dime to take a subway and find my sister's place. I told her I was going to see Babe Ruth at Yankee Stadium. She asked, "How much money have you got?" I said, "I've got a dollar and five cents." I didn't know anything about the subways. So she told me where to go, and she gave me two more tokens to get there. I still had my dollar. And I rode that darn subway. I left at 9:00 A.M. to get to an afternoon game. I got lost and went back and forth on that subway. It seemed like I rode all day with that one token. I was going to find my way into that ballpark if it was the last thing I did. I finally took the right subway to the Bronx and came above ground to see it big and bold, Yankee

Stadium. I didn't know how to get into the stadium, but I saw a line of kids about my age by one gate. The police around the stadium were rounding up a bunch of kids and putting them in a line, and they hustled me into that line, which must have been a hundred feet long. I got in line, and I asked the kid in front of me, "What are we doing in this line? Is this where we pay to get in?" He said, "Oh, no. We're going to get in for nothing." I asked, "How? I've got money. I want to pay to see." He said, "Oh, they'll get a ticket for us." Corporations would buy blocks of tickets and send them out to the ballpark. And they'd line up all these kids, and you'd go in. As long as there was a ticket, you'd get into the ballpark, Yankee Stadium, for nothing, with that ticket. We were just about ready to get in, but the line stopped. "Oh, gosh," I said, "they've run out of tickets, haven't they?" The kid said, "Yeah, but there'll be more." And in about five minutes, here came another batch of tickets and in we went. The kid, whose name was Spinelli, was right. The ticket takers herded us in.

We sat above the third base side in the second deck, right even with third base. There I was, finally watching big league ball clubs. Yankee Stadium was a delightful place. This was my first professional game ever, my first American League game. I was watching the Yankees play, and I don't even know who the other club was. I don't remember and didn't care. There they were, the Yankees, players I knew only by name, word of mouth, radio, and newspaper stories and photographs. There were Ruth and Lou Gehrig and Bill Dickey and Tony Lazzeri, all the great ones larger than life, impossibly real. I couldn't talk. The game was beyond my expectations. Ruth, Gehrig, and Dickey each hit home runs that day. Dickey hit a shot into the second deck. Gehrig hit a line drive into the lower right field stands. It just kind of went in there about twenty feet. Babe came up and hit one into the upper deck. If I can tell you one thing, I have never had a thrill like that. He did that pigeon-toed little trot. And he had the stomach on him too. I wondered how he could play with that big belly. My day was complete. I'll never forget it. I said, "That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to play big league baseball." Spinelli, next to me, said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, yeah."

So when the game was over, Spinelli said, "Come on with me." By this time, I was calling him Tony and he was calling me Chuck. He said, "Chuck, we'll go down here, and we'll see the Babe coming out." So we went down by the players' entrance, and an hour after the game, here came the Babe with his big cigar. He walked out, saying, "Hi, kids, hi, kids." He was the Pied Piper. All the kids hung on his words. I was up there close in front, and he looked down at me. "How are you, kid?" he laughed. I said, "Fine."

He said, "See that one I hit for you?" I said, "Oh, yes." He touched me on the shoulder and asked, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I want to be a ballplayer, Babe." He patted me on the shoulder, and I said, "Oh, boy."

I hitchhiked back home in something of a daze. When I got home to Nanty-Glo, after I stayed with my sister, I told every kid that would listen that Babe Ruth touched that shoulder and I wouldn't let anybody touch it. In fact I doubt that I took a bath for a couple of weeks. I told them the Babe touched that spot, and they all thought I was dreaming. But I know that he touched it. Babe's been an idol of mine all these years. He would be in the Hall of Fame on his pitching career alone. But just marvel at the record and think about those years that he was a pitcher. If he had been converted to an outfielder sooner, five years sooner, he might have hit a thousand home runs.

I played a lot of baseball at Jenners. I probably even subconsciously picked out my future number there. I never did know why I favored number 36. I got it as a manager and for a time as a player. I never could figure it out until here in the later part of my life I took my daughter and my sons back to Jenners, and I stopped by the house to show them the duplex that we had lived in, and there, on the side of that house, was the number 36. I asked the people that were living there if they'd put it up there. "No," they said, "it's been there ever since." Then I recalled my father putting that number up when I was just a little guy. That's where I must have gotten the idea.

Back then I was playing all the time and finally got to play with the bigger kids a time or two, in about the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades or so. I broke a school window before I got to eighth grade. We played in the schoolyard, and we had that taped baseball—you could always get some electrical tape from your father to use. We were hitting toward the schoolhouse, and bang, I hit one through there, and the kids all shouted, "Charlie did it!" I had to sit in the corner for doing that, but I was kind of proud. Nobody else had ever hit that ball that far. And so the schoolteachers made us turn around and hit the ball toward the outfield. This is not a verified record, but I hold the record for the longest ball ever hit, before it hit the ground, in the history of all baseball, maybe even all time. The coal train went by the school from the mines, and one day I hit a ball that landed in a moving coal car that stopped three miles down the track in Boswell. I hit a ball that traveled three miles in the air!

I had some problems with a teacher in fourth grade in Jenners. We played baseball in the spring, and he was always giving me heck. Why, I don't know. I must have been the biggest kid in the class, and he was always

on my case. Finally I got tired of it. Once we were reading the stories about the “village smithy stands under the spreading chestnut tree.” He asked me what I thought about it. I said, “Heck, I don’t know. I wasn’t there.” He really gave me a good going-over. In fact, he put my name up on the board and gave me marks. I had 1-2-3-4-5 across. I had about four or five of them across there, and he gave it to me. I said, “Well, I’ll get him.” He was very proud of his Ford car. So I got a potato and put it in the exhaust pipe and took a stick and pounded it up in there. He couldn’t get the car started, and he couldn’t pry that potato out. Eventually the guys at the garage had to take the exhaust system apart and try to blow air through there to get that potato. Now, mind you, this was in the mid-1930s, when he had one of the first cars in the area. I fixed him good. But I’m glad nobody ever told him. I think he knew that I’d done it. After that, I kind of laid off of him and he didn’t give me a bad time.

We got in some typical mischief as kids there in Jenners. We used to try to sneak a carrot or a tomato from this one lady’s garden. She’d catch us and whack us with her broom as we tried to scramble over the fence. Once we filled a garbage can with all sorts of tin cans and junk and placed it on top of the slanting shed right outside her back door. Then we attached a string from the garbage can handle to her back door and ran off to hide and watch to see and hear the clatter. She would also bake cookies and pies and put them out back. We never did swipe a pie, because she was too sharp for us, but we did beg and plead about the cookies, and occasionally she’d give us some.

I was quite an athlete in those school days. I had some track-and-field skills ahead of my age. One day the high school track team was practicing at the nearby fairgrounds. This was at Jenners Crossroads, and I was in the spring of seventh grade. I had a pole, which I used to pole vault all the time. When I saw the high school team trying out, I decided to try my luck. They had the bar set at nine feet, six inches, and I saw they had a bamboo pole. I’d never seen one. Boy, it was something. The coach was over there giving his track team a talk or something, so I grabbed the pole, ran down the runway, and cleared the bar. When the team saw me, they all chased after me. I thought that they were going to whip the heck out of me. What they were trying to do, I found out later, was to find out where I was going to school. Nobody had cleared nine foot six at the time, and there I was, a seventh-grader, clearing it with ease. I didn’t know one thing about it. The next day I came down, and they were running around the track. It was a half-mile dirt track, a fairgrounds kind of track. When I heard the starter gun go off, I jumped in the race. I was way behind, but then I started really

running and I outran them all. But I didn't finish. I thought they were going to come after me again because I beat all of them. I loved to run.

I was an adventurous kid in many ways. In fact I had a brief career as a pilot. This was in Jenners too. I was in about the fifth or sixth grade. We were right in the pathway of the airline going to Pittsburgh. Those old Ford trimotor planes would fly low, and you could hear them buzzing in the fog. I got a hankering to design and build a plane. So I did. I got some nice pine wood from all around the coal mine that they had thrown away. I built a two-wing plane with a fuselage and everything. Every detail was as authentic as I could get it. I covered it with burlap. There was a cockpit in it, and I put front wheels from an old kid's wagon on it. I put on an aileron so I could lift up the tail. I was going to fly that thing. So my friends and I dragged it up the side of a hill. This hill was sloped real well. I was going to fly that son of a gun. Down I came. Oh, gosh, it was a good thing I ducked, because I sheared the wings right off coming down the hill. The plane hit a barbed wire fence. That kind of put a temporary end to my flying days. But I was always building something, tinkering around with something.

Some years later, when I was about to become a junior in high school, I had another flying episode. A friend of mine, who was a senior, called me up one day and said, "Charlie, come on with me." His father had a Ford car. We went up to the airport at Ebensburg. He said, "We're going to fly this glider." I said, "Fly the glider?" I remembered my first flying experience. So we got up to the airport, and there was this glider. Nobody was around. He said, "I'm going to fly this thing, and you're going to drive the car." I didn't know how to drive a car, but he showed me. It was an old Ford model with the throttle on the steering wheel column. "I'll tell you when let her go," he said. "Pull me down to the end. Now don't run off down over the end of the airfield." It was a big field with a woods down below. So he got out of the car and into the glider. I hooked it up to the car, got the Ford started, jerked it a couple of times, and started down the runway. This glider was on skids, not on wheels. And, boy, he was hollering to let her go, and the plane was up, and I released the hook on the glider, and I turn around and he's flying, boy, he got into an updraft. Everything was going real fine. He circled a couple of times and came in and landed the glider real well. I didn't know that he'd been studying all that stuff about airplanes. He was a sharp guy. He said, "Now Chuck, it's your turn." I thought, I'm not going to fly that thing. But he showed me. "Now here's what you do," he said. "If you let go when it gets off the ground, it'll take off." Well, I didn't want to be called chicken or whatever. Kids were always daring one another to do things. He said, "I'll dare you." And I said, "No, you don't."

So I got in the glider and off we went. He was driving, and the first thing you know, he was going faster and the glider went up. I hollered, "Let her go, let her go." I unhooked and up I went. Aw, dang, it was beautiful, quiet and everything else. So I circled the field, found the updraft, and went up higher in elevation. I circled around, and then thought I better try to land. I came down, and oh, boy, that ground was coming up fast. I finally hit the ground and bounced four or five times. What a thrill! I won't mention names, because we kind of swiped the glider, and I don't want people to know that we did that. But we did it. My buddy became a fine Air Force pilot in World War II. But that was my experience as a glider pilot. When you're young, you do a lot of crazy things.

During that period, of course, the country was in the Great Depression. I don't mind telling you that things were rough at the time. My father worked for the WPA. They were fixing roads and buildings and culverts, and there were a lot of springs in that area. They'd clean out the little streams, cut the wood, trim the woods, thin them out. My father had that background back in the Ukraine, when he was a young man, and his father had done that sort of work too. I myself spent a month in what they called the Youth CCC camps. That was great. We did all kinds of cleaning up work on the highways and on the streets. They issued us a kind of military clothing, a pair of boots and some khakis, what the army wore at that time. We worked from morning till night, but, boy, what a dinner we had. Food wasn't exactly plentiful. A lot of food was a luxury to somebody from a big family, and I enjoyed that. We didn't get paid anything, but we got three good meals a day and a clean cot to sleep on and fresh air. Gosh, it was tremendous. I'd like to see them do that again.

As time went on, in the latter part of my eighth-grade year, we moved from Jenners over to Nanty-Glo, over in Cambria County. Nanty-Glo had a pretty good town team. That summer I went out for the baseball team and darned if I didn't make that men's team. I made the left-field position. Boy, I could catch a ball, and I could run and I could throw a ball well enough to get it back into the infield. And I'd swing a bat, but not great. If I'd have known how bad I was going to be as a hitter, I think I would have started a ground-floor movement to outlaw the curve ball. Every spring, it seemed like we had to deal with a flood at the ballpark in Nanty-Glo. We put up the board fence out in right field. It went from center field to the right-field line, and the creek was there, outside the fence. In the spring the flood waters would come along and take all those fence boards out of there. We'd find them two or three miles down the creek, up against the bank. We had to haul them back and rebuild the fence.

In Nanty-Glo, we had a home on Heisley Row. Heisley Coal Company was the name of the company and the town team. I played on that team my freshman year and throughout my high school years. I played left field, and the best ballplayers played center field. One was John Yorkitis—we called him Snorkey. He taught me a lot about the game. He was an older guy and had been around. He eventually became a police chief. Each coal mining town or steel town had a team sponsored by the company. The companies usually bought all the equipment and supplied a company vehicle, a truck, as transportation. We had a superintendent who was a great baseball fan, and Heisley and Nanty-Glo had great sports fans. He saw to it that we had good equipment. Schweinbrenner was his name. I'll never forget him. He would supply us with uniforms and everything, and we had some of the best. We didn't always have the best ball club, but he was our greatest fan. Sometimes there'd be three or four different sections of town that would have their own team, and they would play like they were supposed to be the minor league team. There were great rivalries, and, wow, you would have thought we were the cursed Yankees or the cursed Dodgers. It was wild, and the fans would get rowdy, especially if you were getting beat, even when you had a pretty good team. That's when the fights would break out. But it was a joy, because it was always Sunday and sometimes you'd play a doubleheader on Sunday. It was great. After the game was over, everybody would gather around. They'd have a keg of beer, and somebody would bring sandwiches and food. It was good for the towns and the young people. All sorts of different people—Ukrainians, Poles, Irish, Swedes, and others—associated. I saw these older guys playing and, boy, I wanted to play. My father got a little better job working in the mines or got work when it was scarce. I didn't get much preferential treatment, though, because I worked Friday, Saturday, and Sunday while I was going to school. The players certainly didn't cut me any slack on the ball field. They brushed me back because I was a kid. Once I got beamed. We didn't have helmets then. I became a little shy at that, but then I got over it. Some guys never get over it. I got over it real quickly.

At that time I started my interest in making innovative baseball equipment. I invented the batting tee when I was playing for the Heisley Coal Company team. We had no place to practice hitting, except the baseball park. We had a lot of what we called blowgun weeds, because they were round, hollow, and strong—we used to blow elderberries and stuff through them like a blowgun. We would take these, when they were dry, and use them as supports. We'd get one that was maybe an inch or two across, and I used to put a old baseball on top of that and hit it off that into a bank.

Then when I was out in the coal mine, I found some pipe that was big, thick rubber, about four inches across. I don't know what it was used for, around the boiler house or somewhere. I got hold of some of those pieces. I took a four-foot piece and sliced it down two ways criss-cross the bottom and folded them up and nailed that to a board. Then I put an old taped baseball on top of it and hit that baseball against the side of the house or into a mattress. Or I'd set tin cans on there and hit them off with a hockey stick. I've often thought that if I had had a batting tee in, say, 1939, I might have become a pretty doggone good hitter, because I did hit .300 three or four times later as a playing manager. Later I had the patent pending on it but didn't have the money to secure the patent. Quite a few guys have used the batting tee. It's a great instrument in teaching, far better than some of these gadgets they have nowadays.

The school, Nanty-Glo High, didn't have a baseball team, so I played on the town team. One day in class, I wasn't paying much attention to the geography teacher, "Buns" Moody, and he had me stand up and he gave me a pretty good going-over. I wasn't the greatest student, but I was good in history and geography. I could draw a map of the United States freehand, with all the states in it. But that day I wasn't paying attention. He finally said, "Hey, Charles, why aren't you like that little boy that was out there—that kid that was out there playing on the Heisley Coal Company team? Why aren't you patterning yourself after him? Why don't you make him your idol?" A girl in front of me was snickering. Ann Labosh was her name. We had alphabetical seating. Helen Lamont and Ann were in front of me, and they started laughing. And "Buns" didn't like that. He asked, "Well, what's so funny, Miss Labosh? Stand up!" So she got up. She said, "Mr. Moody, the boy you're talking about is Chuck!" He said, "What?" She said, "Yeah! Chuck has been playing on the town team." It turned out he was a great baseball fan, and I'll tell you one thing, I never failed one of his classes. After that I was his fair-haired boy. From that day on I was A-1. I could do no wrong. To this day, whenever I go back to Nanty-Glo, some of the kids that I went to school with still remember that episode.

I worked in the coal mines right after my sophomore year in the summertime. Then, after my junior year in the coal mines, something happened that made me forever in my mother's debt. We had a big family: my father, my mother, and nine kids. I was the oldest, so I had to work to help support the family. I worked all that summer in the coal mines, right after my junior year, and my father naturally wanted me to go ahead and work. We were indebted to the company store, and if you've ever heard the song "Sixteen Tons"—"load sixteen tons and what do you get? Another

day older and deeper in debt”—that’s about what we were. We were in the hole all the time, and I was helping work us out of the hole at the company store. The day school was starting, my father got me up and said, “Put your clothes on son. You’re going back in and work with me at the mines.” Supposedly we could do this and we could do that and we could buy me this and buy us that and get out of the debt. So I got up early in the morning at 4:30 and built a fire. I was putting my clothes on, when my mom put her foot down. She said, “No, Charlie’s going to school. He’s going to finish his year in school.” Pop said, “No, he’s not. He’s going.” And my mom, bless her, stood right up in my father’s face and said, “Charlie is going to go to school.” Now I had my work clothes on already, ready to go to work. It was about 5:00 in the morning. “If you take him in, if he goes in the mine, you take him in the mine today,” she said, “I won’t be here when the day’s over, when you come home. I will leave you.” My father looked at her and said, “Do you mean that?” She answered, “Yes, I do, and if you don’t believe me, you take Charlie into the mines. I mean it. I won’t be here. I don’t care. My clothes will be all gone.” “Well,” he said, meekly, “all right.” I never saw my father back down from anything, but he sure backed down from that tiger. I took my work clothes off, washed up, and went back to school. I had never seen my mother like that. I think she’s passed it on to some of my sisters.

The coal mining life my mother helped me get away from was pretty tough. As I look back on it now, I know I didn’t realize how tough it was at the time. I worked in the coal mines after my sophomore and junior years in school. We were paid eighty-five cents or so a ton for coal. We worked two days a week in the summertime. We’d get four empty cars a day. Each car would hold about three tons, so if you had four cars, that would be about twelve tons. After you divided that up, you made about five dollars a day, and your partner, my buddy or my father, made five too. But you didn’t really take home five dollars. The company deducted for your dynamite and your caps and your battery lamp and for sharpening your tools. They usually took something out for the company doctors, and you probably owed the company store money as well. And there were the union check-off dues. “Tennessee Ernie” Ford had it right, but very seldom would we load sixteen tons. We had to heat our houses with firewood a lot of the time, because we couldn’t afford to buy the coal we were digging. Sometimes we picked up coal from the tracks, where the big coal cars would bump each other and the big lumps of coal would fall. You couldn’t afford it otherwise. You had to pay eighteen dollars a ton for the coal to buy it, whereas loading coal, you got paid only eighty-five cents a ton or so.

The work was tough going. It was soft coal, bituminous. But it wasn't in the big veins that they have now. They have big seams now, eight to ten feet, some even bigger that they can scoop out with bulldozers or use giant augers. Our coal tunnels were forty-two inches high. The machine would cut it, make a twenty-four-foot cut on the bottom, and then you had to shoot your coal down. A lot of times you had water and seepage. That meant you had what they called water coal, maybe anywhere from six inches to three feet high, and it was just dead labor. You got seventy-five cents a yard. You had to dig wide enough so the cars could get in there. We used battery lamps, with a battery on the back of your belt, for light. It was really a dandy place to work: bad roof, water, everything that you could think of and worse.

And it was dangerous. Guys would get their fingers blown off. One guy they called "Stubby," who'd lost some fingers in a mine accident, was our manager on the local town team. Every once in a while, he'd get out there and throw a little batting practice. He was funny with those short, stubby fingers. But it was a constant reminder of what could happen in the mines. Gas could explode at any time. Indeed I was in a gas explosion that killed several men, and I was lucky enough to come out alive. The company had twenty-one men out in an old digging. Later I testified about the carelessness of management. Then I went back in to work again to see if I had my nerve back. Everybody said you had to go back in so you wouldn't lose your nerve. So I did.

There was always the threat of labor violence. We went on strike for one of the steel mills down at Johnstown, a sympathy strike of sorts to help them out. The steel mills had their own police force. They rode horses. We were helping the steelworkers out one time, and these police had pick handles and, boy, they'd whack you across the shoulders or on the head if you weren't careful. They gave us a pretty good going-over, so we climbed up on a little bank where they couldn't get up at us and we threw bricks at them. We spooked their horses. I got some of my labor union sympathies working in the mines.

I did learn some carpentry skills around the coal mines. You were always doing this and doing that, digging here and digging there, taking the wrecked cars apart and putting the bolts in on the new boards on the cars. Some of the physical work resembled the physical effort in baseball. I found that when I had to work in the coal mine and do the shoveling, the shovel handle was like a bat and you were swinging a pick handle or a sledgehammer just like you were swinging a bat. About the only thing you didn't do was your running. There was no running in this work. And I

learned something about teamwork. When you were working, you always had a buddy; whether it was your father, your brother, your friend, or some neighbor, there were always two of you. You really had to have teamwork to be successful in the work. You couldn't fight against each other. That's where teamwork came in, and baseball's the same way. You had to have teamwork, the catcher and the pitcher, the infielder and the first baseman, the outfielder yelling "I got it" or "It's all yours." There was always teamwork involved, similar to your work habits, whether it was working in the coal mine, the steel mills, the lumber yard, or wherever.

But I couldn't wait to get away from the mines, to tell the boss to take the job and shove it. My father worked all of his life in the coal mine, but I was able to get out. Baseball was my means of getting away. I decided that I was going to continue to play baseball, and that's what I did. I have fine memories of working there. A lot of people survived, but a lot didn't. It was a tough life. But I prefer baseball. My brothers worked a little bit, but they got out too. John became an insurance agent and an umpire. Later I hired him as a baseball scout. Joe was a professional schoolboy. He went to school and got all kinds of degrees, and he became a fine teacher and a vice principal of a high school. He also became an auctioneer. Although women didn't work in the mines back then, my sisters all took their chances to leave the area. Two of them married ranchers, and the other two wed fine guys too. So we all left. Both my father and my mother encouraged me to do it, especially my father. My mother didn't want to see me leaving home, but my father said to go for it. I've told my sons and daughter the same thing many a time: go for it.

My brother John would borrow chewing tobacco from John Gustin, the basketball and football coach. My brother would spit on the opposing player's leg when he was a guard or forward. But my brother John would correct me, tell me what to do. I was a little bit afraid of him. He was a little rougher than I was. My family used to follow my exploits in the box scores. Back then you could get *The Sporting News* for a dime or twenty cents. My brother John would buy it so he could read the averages wherever I was playing in the late 1930s and early 1940s. He knew exactly what to look for. He'd recognize my name in the box scores. My sisters would kid him and turn the list upside down, and "Charlie Metro" would be way up there in the averages. Some of those years, my average would be down a bit. But he was always pleased when he'd see my average up around the .300 mark.

We always had baseball to help take our minds off the mines. We knew something about the history of the game. We were vaguely aware of some of the guys like Cap Anson who played back in the 1880s, but

more recent players, future Hall of Famers like Sam Rice, Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, and “Home Run” Baker, were more familiar. I knew about some odd incidents like Fred Merkle’s “boner play” of 1908. We heard about the current controversies, such as when Joe Medwick slid into Marv Owen at third base in the 1935 World Series. As for current players, mostly you’d just hear about them. You’d rarely see them. There was no television, so you couldn’t watch them and see what they looked like. They were names in the paper, and you could read their stats at that time. You could see that this guy would hit a home run and so forth, and once in a while you would see his name in the All-Star Game.

Occasionally one major leaguer, Rip Collins, came to town. He was from Nanty-Glo, even though the baseball encyclopedias list him as being from Altoona. He had some pretty fair years with the St. Louis Cardinals. He was a power hitter. Rip Collins was the first big league ballplayer that I’d ever seen come in and put on a hitting exhibition at the local ballpark. The right-field fence ran alongside the creek, and he hit the ball clear over the creek in right field, and, boy, we thought that was an awful long way. He’d bring a couple dozen balls and put on a batting practice show. And all we kids would do was get over there across the creek and find the balls, because we’d never seen a big league baseball before.

In the mid-1930s we went into Pittsburgh and saw the Pirates play. Those were my first National League games. I saw all those guys, some of whose names I can’t even recall. But they were there. The Waner boys, Lloyd and Paul, were there as well as Pie Traynor and Arky Vaughan. There were a lot of those good ballplayers. I was almost petrified with awe. Our high school graduation trip was to Pittsburgh in 1937. They took us out to the ballpark. Somebody arranged for tickets for us. We went out and saw the ball game. I liked Forbes Field. I was sad when they switched over to Three Rivers. It was a wonderful old sports field, a great old ballpark in a nice setting. It had the longest distance from home plate back to the stands. In fact, you could score a guy from second base on a passed ball. I don’t think it’s ever been done anywhere else.

About that same time, I saw the Negro League Homestead Grays play in Pittsburgh. One of the mine bosses, Ken Woodrine, who had an automobile, wanted to see this game, and he asked my father if he wanted to see it, and he said to bring me with him. My father had given Ken Woodrine a bat. I think I saw Satchel Paige pitch and Josh Gibson catch. I was amazed at how well they played. I thought, gee whiz, would I ever be that good? I couldn’t imagine anybody doing all those things that those black ballplayers did. I was fascinated by them. There were quite a few African-Americans at

the steel mills, and we played against some of them. They were really good. I was fascinated by their ability. I'll never forget one outfielder. Man, could he run! Holy cow, every time he got on base he would steal second, steal third, and then dance around with great showmanship. I thought, wow, if I could just run like he could!

In addition to watching the Pirates and the Negro League teams, I got to see some pretty good teams over in Johnstown. My father and I used to walk down there, ten miles away, and watch the game at night. We'd get back in time for him to put on his clothes and go to work, and I'd go to school. Sometimes we would grab a ride with the early bakery delivery trucks going to Johnstown. The Johnstown Johnnies were the St. Louis Browns farm club in the Middle Atlantic League. They had Chuck Stevens, who became the director of the Baseball Professional Ballplayers' Association. Chuck was one of my idols. He was a real good fielder. My father was crazy about him too. He would pick out a favorite and, boy, you couldn't shake him from his choices. Johnny Lucadello was also there, and I thought he was about as good a ballplayer as I'd ever seen. I saw Hank Greenberg's brother, Joe, play there too. And I saw Hugh Alexander and Frank Scalzi, names I remember from different clubs. My father loved Hugh. He was a right-handed hitter. I believe he led the league in just about everything that year. A year later, I read in *The Sporting News* that he had lost his hand in a tractor accident in Oklahoma, and when I told my father, he broke down and cried about that. Hugh became one of the top talent scouts in the history of baseball. He was very knowledgeable, having had a playing background. But there were cheerier things too. We saw them experiment with a yellow baseball, back in the mid-1930s, decades before Charlie Finley thought of the idea.

I was in awe at the Johnstown ballpark, especially at how fast the players were. My father would say, "Well, you can run fast. You can throw the ball. You can hit the ball." He would encourage me. And wouldn't you know it? A couple of years later, I had my first professional baseball tryout in that same stadium.

When I was a senior in high school, in 1937, the Browns announced a tryout camp at Johnstown in the local paper. I decided I was going to go down there to the tryout camp. Prior to hearing about the camp, I had started running. I'd been playing basketball too. As a kid you never got out of shape. And I loved to run. So I got in pretty good condition to attend that trial camp. I had played on the town team in my sophomore and junior years, so I felt ready. But all my friends and teammates ridiculed me and said I wouldn't make it. The guys on the regular team said I'd never make it. They said that guys from the whole area of three or four counties and as

far away as Pittsburgh would show up. The more they said that, the more determined I was to prove them wrong.

Because there would be so many guys there, I wanted to be noticed. I had a buck or two saved up, so I went down to the dry goods store and bought myself a pair of those black stockings that the kids, boys and girls, used to wear, that went up above the knee. I was going to be noticed. I was going to wear those black socks. The town team stockings were all half blue and half white, half red and half white, half green, half black and half white. Stripes were kind of standard for the teams up there to have for their stockings. The black socks would set me apart.

I played hookey from high school. I hooked a ride on the early bakery truck that serviced the grocery stores in Nanty-Glo from Johnstown. At the tryout camp, I put on those black socks. I had a uniform, pants and a shirt, a sweatshirt, and I had my glove. We registered, signed a card, listing your full name, your age, and where you were from, your address and everything. They gave you a number to pin on your back. I don't remember except that it was high. The highest was up in the 1,500s.

The tryout camp was at Point Stadium in Johnstown. It was named Point Stadium because it pointed at two rivers right there. It was right near a Pennsylvania Railroad bridge, a big stone bridge, where all the debris piled up during the 1889 Johnstown flood and during the second Johnstown flood too. The field was muddy. It was spring, and the frost hadn't gotten out yet. Jack Fournier, the manager of the Johnstown Johnnies, was one of the scouts there running the camp. He had had a fifteen-year major league career with the White Sox, Yankees, Cardinals, Dodgers, and Braves as a first baseman and occasional outfielder.

The first thing they did was warm up the pitchers. While they were warming up the pitchers, infielders and outfielders were out there warming up your arm. They wanted to try your arm out first. So they had you line up in the outfield in a long line of about 50 to 100 outfielders. The scouts and some of the helpers would hit a ground ball out to you. You'd come in, field it, and throw it home. They were testing your arm. If you couldn't throw, you couldn't play anywhere. I had a pretty good arm. My arm was coming around. I played and was getting stronger. I think I outthrew every guy there, both for accuracy and for distance. To start, we were throwing about 225 to 250 feet. Then we'd move way back to 300 to 325 feet. I was shining and, oh, I had those black socks. Fournier kept calling to me, "Hey, Black Stockings, you got a pretty good arm." I was scared to death. Still all they were doing was hitting a ball out to one of the players, who'd pick it up and bounce it on the dirt or second base.

If you didn't have the skills, if you didn't have the arm, a guy came around and said, "That's it, son, take off your number." Oh, God, guys were crushed. A lot of them couldn't throw. In fact, some threw like a girl and were eliminated. And before that, they'd line you up and take a look at your size. I was about five foot ten or so, and I weighed about 165 or 170 pounds. I had played football and basketball, so I made their cut. They were also letting heavyset guys go as well as guys with gray hair. A lot of guys would get crew cuts to look younger, but if they saw a little gray, they'd say, "Take off your number, son." They also discouraged the kids, the fourteen- or fifteen-year-olds. It took a whole day to thin out some of the players.

The camp went on for five days. It took a long time to get through 1,500 guys. The next thing they did was hold running trials, sixty-yard dashes. They'd line up eight or ten guys on the foul line. Point Stadium was a football stadium too. The football field ran from right field to the third base side. They'd line you up right at the yard markers. They had the two scouts line up seven, eight, ten guys, and then you heard, "On your mark, get set, go" and, boom, the gun. I could run pretty well. I wanted to see how they were doing it, so I waited until about the fourth group and walked in then. I was way out in front. Oh, boy, I felt good. I stood out when they saw those black stockings. This was an all-day affair, because we were all running in elimination heats. As soon as you won one, they took three or four of the winners and ran them together. They didn't want to overlook anything. I think I ran eight or ten heats, and I won practically every one of them. I was beaten by one guy.

Next they hit infielders ground balls to check their hands and watch them throw. Fournier said, "Hey, Black Stockings, get out there." So I went out to shortstop, because I had a fairly decent outfield arm. I didn't field ground balls too well, but I fought them. I fielded some ground balls and threw them over to first base. I threw a couple right up in the seats, which turned out to be a plus, even though I thought it was terrible. Fournier told me my arm was good, a strong arm. Some of the guys were bouncing the ball on throws from third or shortstop, so they got eliminated. After that we started in the outfield. Jack asked me what position I had played, and I said I was an outfielder, so he put me in center field. They started hitting fly balls out to the outfielders. They put some guys in left, some in center, and he was hitting to them. Now I thought I was being favored a little. I thought I was being singled out because I was surviving. This was the second or third day. After Fournier eliminated a whole bunch of guys, he took me by myself and started hitting fly balls to me in center field. I never dropped a one. I could field, still could till the day I quit. I caught

everything, and I was watching. He was trying to be clever with me and he'd slice the ball, or he'd swing real hard and hit one underneath and it wouldn't go very far. I'd have to recover and come in. Eventually I caught on, and I caught everything that he hit.

The next big test was hitting. This was the third or fourth day, on which they watched us hit. Fournier sat there behind a little screen with his pad. Some of these kids that had lasted that far would take the bat and hit cross-handed. They got eliminated right away. The scouts had finally selected a group of pitchers, and we had an all-day batting session. The pitchers were showing off their stuff too. So you had two hungry groups competing against each other. They had catchers catching the ball too, sitting right back close to the screen. I had played against pretty good county league pitching, so I felt pretty confident. I watched the pitching for a while to see what was going on. They changed pitchers real quick at one point. The guy they brought in couldn't throw well. He had no control. So I grabbed a bat and jumped in there. I had been hitting off that batting-tee contraption that I had. I had a little bit of a swing down. He started throwing, and I swung and I missed. I cut my eyes to see if the scouts were going to take my number. I swung and missed again. Fournier was sitting there, mumbling something. I swung and missed a third time, and he started to say something, but I said, "No, I'm not, no, I'm not, I'm going to hit one. I'm going to hit some." He looked at me and said, "Well, all right, Black Stockings, if you want to hit, go ahead and hit." Finally I ripped one pretty good. Left field was real short at Point Stadium. It was probably 270 feet, with a big, high screen, and I hit one on top of the screen. I stood in there and they threw me another, and this time I hit it pretty well too, maybe 300 feet. It wasn't a great drive, but I stood in there and hit about eight or ten balls. Fournier asked, "What are you going to do? Take up all the batting practice, Black Stockings?" I said, "You didn't tell me to quit, so I'm hitting."

That was the clincher for me. Out of the 1,500 guys, they chose fourteen for contracts with the Browns organization. I was one of them. Only three of us played any length of time. I never saw eleven of the guys again, but there were two others, Gus Donatelli and Tony Venzon, whom I played with and who went on to become very good National League umpires. They were a couple of years older than I was. Donatelli was a third baseman. Later we played together in Virginia for a while. Venzon was from right in our neck in the woods. He played with a great handicap. On his glove hand, he had no thumb. His thumb had gotten cut off when he was a kid, and he had a glove built real strong to compensate. He was a shortstop, he could run

and he could hit, and he had a good arm that never bothered him, but he just didn't quite make it. Fourteen of us made the cut, but what tickled me the most was that some of the guys from my town who kept telling me I wouldn't get selected got dismissed, mostly for age. I was the youngest one chosen.

So finally the time came when Jack Fournier came up to me with a contract to sign for sixty dollars a month. I took it, and he asked how old I was. I told him seventeen. I was actually eighteen, but there had been some confusion about my birth certificate, which the doctor had written out in Ukrainian. He said, "Why don't you go have your mom and dad sign this and bring it back tomorrow?" So I took the contract and went home. But on the third day of the tryout camp, I had looked up in the stands and there was my father sitting there watching me. He had his legs crossed. He was up there with some people and motioning out there. I had let my parents believe I had been going off to school. I said, "Oh, gosh," but I didn't lie. I didn't tell a lie. You wouldn't dare tell a story to my father. He said, "When you're done, son, you'll take your medicine, you'll take a punishment," and I said, "But I'll never lie." So that night he was feeling pretty good, and my mom asked, "What are you feeling so happy about?" And he never said anything, so my mom didn't know it either. The next day he was down there. He missed work, and he wouldn't dare miss a day of work. So when I brought the contract home, he said, "Hmm, you've got a baseball contract." And I said, "Yes, sir, Pop, I do." He asked what I wanted to do. I said, "I want to play." He asked what the contract was for. I said, "Sixty dollars a month, but I'm not going to sign it." He said, "Well, that's up to you."

I took the contract back the next day. Jack Fournier called me into the office there at Point Stadium in Johnstown. He asked, "Charlie, did you bring your contract back?" I said, "Yes, sir," and I handed it to him. He said, "Hey, you didn't sign it." I said that was right, and he asked why I didn't. I replied, "Well, I'm going to have to work in the coal mines, I guess." And he said, "Why, you got a chance to be a ballplayer." I said, "Well, I have to have a hundred dollars." There was some silence. He asked, "What do you mean, a hundred dollars?" I said, "Well, I have to have a hundred." He kind of grinned and asked, "Well, what do you want a hundred dollars for, Charlie?" "I want to buy my mother a washing machine. If I buy my mother a washing machine, then I can go play baseball," I told him. I came from a large family, nine kids, and I had watched my mother wash our clothes by hand all those years. He said, "Well, all right," and called the business manager over. Jack said to him, "Write Charlie out a check for a hundred

dollars.” So he wrote out a check to Charlie Metro, using my father’s first name as my last name. I said, “Oh, I don’t want that. I can’t take that.” He asked, “Why not?” I answered, “I can’t take that. I want the money.” Hell, I’d never seen a hundred-dollar check, let alone that much money. So he asked, “Well, how do you want it?” I said, “In money.” “Well, how do you want it?” I replied, “One-dollar bills.” So Fournier had the business manager go down and get a hundred dollars in one-dollar bills for me.

I took the contract home, and my father signed it. He could barely write, but he signed it. A friend of ours, the superintendent, OK’d the signature. I gave my mother the hundred dollars. She wondered if I had stolen it. But she went out and bought a washing machine. Years later, when I was managing the Vancouver club in the late 1950s, I looked up in the stands and saw Jack Fournier there, scouting for another major league club. He waved me over. He was thrilled to see me, and I was also pleased to see him. He said, “Kid, I want to ask you a question. Did you really buy your mother a washing machine?” I answered, “Yes, sir.” And he laughed like heck. I also told that story to my Denver banker friend Merlyn Williams, and he got a big kick out of it. “Now, if I give you a check, you are going to have to take it,” Merlyn would say.

But that day back in 1937, I jumped at the chance. Boy, if baseball is going to pay this well, I thought, I might as well stick with it. I didn’t care that it was the St. Louis Browns, who had had terrible seasons and never been in a World Series. The Yankees were the big team, but the Yankees never came around. I had an opportunity to go to college, but I didn’t have the money. I was being recruited as a football athlete and a basketball player. Penn State, for instance, was interested in me for football. But at that time, heck, you couldn’t work your way through school, you couldn’t get a scholarship, you could get only a little help. From the financial standpoint, I just couldn’t go to college. This baseball offer was an opportunity. You had to grasp it. So I chose professional baseball. I’ve never regretted it since. I would never exchange that for anything in this world, not even the U.S. presidency.